

# عقباتِ اسلام



FIROZI

INDER JIT LALL



*I crave for a sight—  
Someone appearing on the edge of a roof;  
And over her visage  
Her black tresses dishevelled.*

## A LIFE OF FORTITUDE

**A**LMOST in the midway of Chandni Chowk in old Delhi, a street is known as Ballimaran. Inside this street one comes across a bylane on the one side of which is situated the edifice of a Dwakhana (a chemist of indigenous drugs) and on the other side is the mosque of Mohammed Sharif Khan. Besides, one views some dilapidated houses, a few heaps of debris and some newly-repaired abodes around this place. On either side of this bylane (known as Gali Qasim Jan), the houses are constructed in old styles made of small bricks. This name the bylane acquired in the middle of the eighteenth century.

Among these half-dilapidated houses, there are certain premises which signify that the lives of their inhabitants used to have ample grandeur and fascination in olden times. There is some revealing history behind this bylane which can be traced back to the era of Shah Alam, the Moghul ruler on the throne of Delhi in those days.

It is said that three Turk (Aibak) brothers migrating from Bokhara and journeying through Attock and Punjab in



Moghul rule was visible from all quarters. Mirza Quoqan Beg Khan found another change in his career in joining the forces of Maharaja Alwar and settling down at Agra (then known as Akberabad). Quoqan Beg Khan had three sons and four daughters among whom one was named Mirza Abdullah Beg Khan who was born at Delhi. Abdullah Beg Khan after his father's death, was forced to think of some ways of earning his livelihood. He was married to Izzat-ul-Nisa Begum, a literate lady who would exhibit a lot of interest in domestic and social affairs. She was the daughter of Khwaja Mirza Ghulam Hussain Khan, a commandant (*Kamindan*) and an aristocrat who owned a large estate at Agra and enjoyed a comfortable life.

Mirza Abdullah Beg Khan, nick-named 'Mirza Doolha' used to live with his in-laws. His wife lived with her parents till her last days because Mirza Abdullah Beg had no fixed or permanent stay at one place. According to Altaf Hussain Hali, Raja Bhakhtawar Singh of Alwar had not employed Abdullah Beg at some dignified position. In fact he was sent by the Raja to quell an uprising created by the Zamindar of Garhi in 1802. The Mirza died of a bullet wound there and was buried at Rajgarh.

The Raja fixed some allowance for the two sons of Mirza Abdullah Beg Khan, besides a couple of villages which continued to be under the charge of the boys for a long period. One of these boys was Mirza Ghalib. This little boy presented a panegyric to the court of Raja Sheo Dhyan Singh of Alwar in 1860 drawing the Raja's attention to a commitment made by his ancestors for paying adequate compensation to Ghalib. Ghalib attempted to create in his eulogistic poem, a compassion in the mind of the Raja by alluding to the fame of Abdullah Beg Khan and to his grave which reminded one of the deceased's association with the Alwar Court.

## THE BIRTH

Mirza Ghalib whose full name was Asadullah Beg Khan was the elder son of Mirza Abdullah Beg Khan. He was born on Wednesday, 27th December 1797 before dawn. Like father, like son, Ghalib too had a nick-name 'Mirza Nosha'. He had one brother, Mirza Yusuf Ali Khan, two years younger and one sister, Khanam, a few years elder to him.

Ghalib enjoyed a comfortable childhood. In one of his letters to Munshi Sheo Narain poetically surnamed 'Aram' he refers to the extensive estate enjoyed by him from his mother's side and names 'Khatya Wali Haveli,' 'Gaddaryon Wala Katra', 'Kashmiran Wala Katra' situated adjacent to this estate. "At the terrace of Kashmiran Wala Katra, I used to fly kites and have kite-duels with Raja Balwan Singh", Ghalib reveals. This big estate where Ghalib spent his childhood, is in good condition and is situated at Peepal Mandi, Agra. It is entitled nowadays as Kalan Mahal, and in good old days used to be called Haveli of Gajraj Singh. These days it is owned by a banker and within the premises of this Haveli is located a girls high school.

After Abdullah Beg's death, his brother, Nasrullah Beg Khan took the responsibility of supporting his brother's family. Nasrullah Beg Khan was married to the daughter of Nawab Ahmed Baksh Khan of Loharu. Nasrullah's wife died without an issue. And as such, he brought up the three children - Ghalib, his brother and his sister with utmost affection and care.

Nasrullah Beg was the administrator of Akberabad (Agra) appointed by the Marathas before the British took over the reins of government. It was in 1803 that Lord Lake attacked Akberabad and Mirza Nasrullah Beg accepted a defeat without an encounter. Nawab Ahmed Baksh Khan had cordial relations both with the British Government and Lord Lake. This Lord in the light of his regard for the

Nawab, appointed Nasrullah Beg Khan to be the incharge of a cavalry consisting of four hundred soldiers. A sum of seventeen hundred rupees was fixed as his salary. Nasrullah Beg somehow captured the areas of Sonk and Sunsa from the soldiers of Holkar State and Lord Lake agreed by virtue of a deed dated 21.9.1805 that the areas so forcibly captured be merged with the administration of Nasrullah Beg. Unfortunately, Nasrullah Beg after about a year of his elder brother's death, himself passed away in 1806. It so happened that he fell from an elephant, and succumbed to the injuries received on his leg.

Nawab Ahmed Baksh Khan was highly grieved at the death of his son-in-law. All the same, he remained most mindful of the two boys, Mirza Ghalib and Mirza Yusuf, once again orphaned at the death of their uncle, Nasrullah Beg Khan. Ghalib was about nine in those days.

#### FAMILY PENSION

Nawab Ahmed Baksh Khan had the privilege to receive from the British an estate of Ferozepur Jhirka and some areas around Hodal. Besides, Maharaja Bakhtawar Singh had given him certain area of Loharu. It was agreed upon that the Nawab would pay twenty-five thousand rupees every year to the British Government against retaining those estates under his administration. After the death of Nasrullah Beg Khan, the British revised their policy. As a result, the estate of Sonk and Sunsa was withdrawn for administration by the Nawab and the cavalry disbanded. However, Nawab Ahmed Baksh Khan was permitted to maintain a cavalry of just fifty soldiers. But the British Government was at liberty to commission it from the Nawab in case of emergency.

The British Government excused the Nawab to pay a sum of twenty-five thousand rupees every year. This amount was distributed thus : A sum of fifteen thousand rupees was earmarked for the maintenance of the cavalry and the rest

(ten thousand rupees) for paying the allowance or pension to the dependants of Nasrullah Beg Khan.

It was through some trick that Nawab Ahmed Baksh Khan secured a letter from Lord Lake according to which the dependants of Mirza Nasrullah Beg were to be paid a sum of five thousand rupees annually out of which one and a half thousand was sanctioned for Mirza Ghalib and his brother. In other words the sum of rupees ten thousand earlier sanctioned was subsequently reduced to seven hundred and fifty rupees for each of the two brothers. Mirza Ghalib and his brother were expected to receive two pensions, one from the Maharaja Alwar and the other from Nawab Ahmed Baksh Khan. It is not authenticated when the former pension was ceased to be paid. It is however, recorded that the pension from the British Treasury continued to flow to Ghalib up to the year 1850.

#### EARLY EDUCATION

In early education, Mohammed Mu'azzam was a significant figure who gave training to Ghalib and taught him some elementary Persian. Mu'azzam was a scholar and by profession a teacher in a small school of Agra where Ghalib was a promising student. Ghalib was extremely brilliant at studies and was capable of composing verses when he was hardly nine. One day, he composed a Persian couplet and showed it to his teacher who did not appreciate the usage of a particular rhyme scheme. This upset Ghalib very much, but he was able to trace a similar couplet from the anthology of Zahuri (a Persian poet). Impressed by Ghalib's boldness and high literary ability, the teacher revised his opinion and now praised Ghalib's couplets. This inspired the little boy to practise more and more verses.

Mulla Abdus Samad was equally and effectively associated with Ghalib's early tutelage in Arabic, Persian and miscellaneous laws of prosody. Abdus Samad was a Zoroastrian by birth who embraced Islam at a later stage of his

life. His name before conversion was Hurmuz (or Hurmuzd). He had arrived in India during 1810-12 on some travel mission and settled at Agra. Ghalib in those days was hardly 14. Ghalib provided a comfortable stay for his teacher at his place for about two years. Persian was the mother-tongue of Abdus Samad and he had a thorough and comparative study of various religions. He gave thorough guidance to Ghalib in theology, Persian, Arabic and other literary subjects. Especially his lessons in Persian grammar and posody proved of much value to Ghalib.

Abdus Samad loved Ghalib from the core of his heart. This is borne out from the copious references that Ghalib made in his letters to his friends. The teacher very sincerely taught the pupil and the latter continued to record his reverence for his guide till the last days of his life.

Various biographers and commentators like Hasrat Mohani and Sheikh Ikram have enumerated Nazir Akberabadi too in the category of early teachers of Ghalib. Maulana Hali has an apt answer on this point in his observation: "Supposing Ghalib got some training from Nazir Akberabadi also in his life, it need not surprise anyone. In a way, it adds to the esteem of Nazir and does not in any way, dwarf the position of Ghalib."

Certain other literary personalities sharpened Ghalib's literary genius during his childhood. The street in Agra where Ghalib spent his childhood for a number of years was inhabited by a handful of scholars and litterateurs of the time. Mulla Wali Mohammed's association who was a noted interpreter of Maulana Roumi's masnavi, brightened Ghalib's mind in a broad way. Another figure was Mir Azam Ali (a teacher by profession) who translated 'Sikandra Nama' of Nizami. He was a close friend of Ghalib and composed a masnawi entitled 'Ikseer-e-Azam'. In this street was also situated the school of Moulvi Mohammed Kamil, another

scholar of those days.

The grandfather (father of Ghalib's mother) used to live in this lane for a large number of years and was one of the topmost personalities of his time. His house as well as the residence of Ghalib was frequently visited by scholars and poets and longwinded discussions on matters of philosophy, music, history, religion and prosody, used to be held. Such was the scope of social and literary intercourse for Ghalib.

#### PRECOCIOUS MIND

Ghalib had a precocious mind and a God-gifted genius for the Muse. When he was hardly eleven, he started composing verses. There is a classic reference of a Persian couplet which he weaved at that age. All the same, most of the poetry that he produced in the early period was in a combined language—Urdu and Persian. Ghalib composed verses on the pattern of Bedil, Asir and Shaukat and as a result, he was able to produce some 2,000 couplets when he was hardly 25.

There is another illustration of Ghalib's precocious mind. It was Nawab Husam-ud-Dawlah who out of love took a few couplets of Ghalib to Lucknow to show them to Mir Taqi Mir, the so-known 'King of Urdu Ghazal'. Mir was simply startled to go through those beautiful verses and spontaneously predicted: "If this child gets the tutelage of a learned teacher, he will rise one day like a star on the firmament of poetry otherwise he would be practising just nonsense couplets." This prediction continued to prove its verity day by day and the boy indeed rose one day to be a great poet of India.

Ghalib was wedded to Umrao Begum, daughter of Elahi Baksh Khan M'aruf, the younger brother of Nawab Ahmed Baksh Khan. The association of Nawab Ahmed Baksh Khan and Nawab Elahi Baksh Khan enlarged Ghalib's

literary circle and gave him ample opportunities to enlarge his periphery of friendship.

#### MARRIAGE—A COMPROMISE

The couple settled at Delhi almost permanently after their marriage. It was a union of two hearts, the husband an intellectual and the wife a conservative, orthodox and God-fearing lady. Temperamentally, Ghalib was not content to have an unintellectual partner, but he made a compromise throughout his life in providing all comforts and amenities to Umrao Begum. All the same, Ghalib always remained bold to give air to his views about married state of life. He occasionally referred to his marriage as "imprisonment of life" and his partner as a "shackle". "Married life is death to me. I have never been happy being so entangled," he once observed. A Persian quatrain truly represents Ghalib's views over marriage :

O'man, I know that your  
Desire to proceed towards Ka'ba is pious,  
For you are heading speedily,  
And have a quarrelsome wife at home.

Ghalib did not like his friends to share marriage's entanglement. Once Mirza Tafta, a Ghalib's friend and admirer, wrote to him that on the death of the second wife of Umrao Singh (his disciple), he had decided to go in for a third marriage so that the new wife could look after his children. "I feel a pity as well as an envy for Umrao Singh," Ghalib wrote in reply. "My God, here is a man who though got rid of his shackles twice in life, yet does not like to remain free. And here is a man like me who has been carrying a noose round his neck for the past half a century. This noose neither snaps nor does it strangle me to death. Tell Umrao Singh that I will look after his children. He should not entangle himself in domestic affairs any more."

Ghalib in a way, was a contrast to Umrao Begum who was highly religious, devoting a good deal of her time to

daily prayers and recitation of Qoran. Ghalib would live in a distinct apartment than her wife's. At one stage, Umrao Begum separated her crockery because Ghalib behaved like a non-conservative, at times an irreligious man.

### AN INTENSE ROMANCE

Ghalib was a romantic figure, almost a Byron with predilection to fix his mind with some love other than Umrao Begum, who would appreciate his genius or like to fall in love with him. The experience of a practical romance he had with a courtesan. This is the most mysterious side of Ghalib's personality, somewhat fervid and intense.

Ghalib's sweetheart was a Dumni (a lowly woman), somewhat akin to a mercenary singing-girl. This unkind singing-girl perhaps did not admire the high quality of Ghalib's verse. It naturally made Ghalib heart-broken and he continued to shower his amorous sallies for her in his poetry or prose. In a letter to Mirza Hatim Ali Beg, Ghalib wrote: "These Moghuls are wonderful people. In courtship they are so perfect in that a Moghul's beloved feels always entrapped to die for her lover. I have Moghul blood coursing through my veins and I have shackled a Dumni in my love. May God forgive us both and you and your beloved. We are indeed love-stricken. It is some forty or fifty years ago that I fell in love with that Dumni. I have now abandoned hovering round her street and become oblivious of the art of love. All the same, I reminisce her coquetry now and then." One of Ghalib's famous ghazals is said to be an euphemistic expression of his elegiac sentiments for this Dumni.

There are remarkable couplets in Ghalib's poetry which clearly reflect that Ghalib appreciated the beauty of the fair-sex believing that some lover is needed to appreciate love and beauty :



They query  
Who is Ghalib ?  
Let someone elucidate  
What can I state ?

Some lover is needed,  
 O' neglectful,  
 To appreciate the fair faces,  
 And the fine figures.

Once Ghalib wrote to Hatim Ali Mehr : "Pray God, never take affliction of love to heart. If there is no Chunna Jan, let there be some Munna Jan." Both these were the names of beloved of Hatim Ali Mehr. Such frank statements and poetic effusions of Ghalib indicate his ideas about love. But by and large, he proved to be a sincere partner of Umrao Begum. In love affairs he was interested to be "a fly of sugar and never a bee of honey." Romance for him remained a mere pastime, a casual change and a sort of amusement. Maulana Ghulam Rasul Mehr so sums up Ghalib's married life : "Ghalib would love his wife very much and this love remained unabated even up to the last days of their life."

#### VARIOUS ABODES

After his migration from Agra, Ghalib continued to change from one house to another in Delhi, but spent most of his time in Delhi in Gali Qasim Jan and Phatak Habash Khan. He used to live in one house changing it to another after some years. Thus, he resided in the Haveli of Kale Sahib, in the house of Hakim Mohammed Khan, Karora Wali Haveli and in the house of Ismail Khan. Ghalib yearned to live the life of a prince, but nature did not allow him to enjoy the ample luxury which he wanted to indulge in. He enjoyed the youth days to his best in writing poetry, associating with prominent writers and scholars and especially with the Europeans. All the same a good house always remained a problem for him.

A description of some of the houses, Ghalib lived in is given here. In one of his letters to Nawab Allah-ud-din-Ahmed Khan, Ghalib so describes his pitiable plight : "I

am passing these days in misery. The walls of Mahalsarai have collapsed, the latrine is raised to the ground ; the roofs are dripping. Your aunty ejaculates at times : 'I am dying, I am dying.' The condition of the Diwankhana is worse than the Mahalsarai. "I do not fear death. I am depressed because of lack of comfort. The ceiling has become a veritable sieve. If the cloud rains for two hours, the ceiling rains for four."

At another place, Ghalib describes the heavy rains of Delhi which caused substantial havoc in 1862. As a result, hundreds of houses were either damaged or dilapidated. The account goes thus: The rains started from July and those were of a strange order. It would rain two or four times a day and every time it was such as if rivers and rivulets were flowing. The drawing room which used to be a palace for me to spend my leisure and sleeping hours and could be a niche of life and death, somehow did not collapse. But the roof overhead became almost a veritable sieve. I placed a basin at one place and a bucket at the other while a spittoon at the third. I had the chance to stay in Noah's Ark for three months. Thanks that I've now attained salvation."

One house which Ghalib inhabited was situated behind the mosque adjacent to the house of Hakim Mohammed Khan. Ghalib had incidentally composed earlier a couplet which proved very prophetic one day. It is rendered as :

Under the shadow of a mosque,  
I've raised an abode ;  
Ah' a worthless slave in me,  
Has become a neighbour of God.

The owner of the last house which Ghalib inhabited was Ismail Khan and the rent assessed was at the rate of five and a half rupees per month. But it had a defect that its male and female apartments were situated at a considerable distance from each other. Its female apartment was on the opposite

side of the lane and is a part of the premises held these days by Hindustani Dwakhana.

#### HARD TIMES

Ghalib had to face a hard time in his early life at Delhi. He used to receive seven hundred and fifty rupees every year from the British Government as a pension besides some aid from Alwar Court and some money from his own mother who was staying at Agra. With all this, Ghalib could hardly make both ends meet.

Nawab Ahmed Baksh Khan decided in consultation with the British Government and the Alwar Court in October 1882 that after his death, his son, Sham-sud-Din Ahmed Khan would occupy the throne. This fellow was born of Khanam. It was also decided that the income of the estate of Alwar would be shared by both the brothers, Amin-ud-Din Ahmed Khan and Zia-ud-Din Ahmed Khan. To avoid any conflict which might arise between the brothers, Nawab Ahmed Baksh Khan enforcing the provisions of his will, declared Sham-sud-Din Ahmed Khan to be the ruler of Ferozpur Jhirka.

This decision had an adverse reaction against Ghalib's pension. He had maintained cordial relations with two brothers of the Nawab, but the Nawab himself attempted to put obstacles in the payment of pension to Ghalib in as much as Ghalib's brother, Yusuf Mirza received a rude shock of it and went mad in his late twenties.

As a cultured and well-mannered person, Ghalib had a deep regard for Nawab Ahmed Baksh Khan, who was the brother of Ghalib's father-in-law. But the Nawab after his brother's death in 1826 played a dishonest game with Ghalib. It was Khwaja Haji, Officer-in-charge of the cavalry unit and a remote relation of Ghalib who was now privileged to receive some two thousand rupees (vide order June 7 1806). Nawab Ahmed Baksh Khan had assured Ghalib that after

Khwaja Haji's death, this amount would be transferred in the name of Ghalib. But to Ghalib's surprise, it was Haji's son who started receiving this amount. This sudden reversal of Ghalib's fortune by Nawab Ahmed Baksh Khan's abrupt and unforeseen action upset Ghalib and he planned to represent to the Supreme Government at Calcutta for justice

#### TRIP TO CALCUTTA

Ghalib set out on a journey from Delhi and touching Ferkhabad and Kanpur reached Lucknow. The people of Lucknow, accorded him a warm reception though the poet so put in verse that the purpose of his visit was too vague to him :

The cause of visiting Lucknow is not clear to me,  
For I've little mind to enjoy travels or sights.

Ghazi-ud-Din Hyder Shah was on the throne of Oudh but the actual reins of administration were in the hands of Agha Mir. As he heard of the news of Ghalib's arrival in Lucknow, he expressed his willingness to see him. Ghalib composed a topical panegyric and was ready for an appointment with Agha Mir and Ghazi-ud-Din Hyder. Ghalib also composed a prose piece for presenting it to Agha Mir.

It was a convention in those days to offer presentation (*nazr*) as a symbol of respect to Agha Mir, but Ghalib in spite of his preparation, wanted an exemption from such a convention. Rather Ghalib desired that Agha Mir should receive him with that dignity and grace as the poet used to enjoy from his admirers. Agha Mir refused to accept this pre-condition and so the proposed meeting did not materialise at all.

Ghalib was confined to bed for about half a year due to ill-health. As there was little progress, he decided to

migrate to Banda where Nawab Zulfiqar Ali Bahadur who had maintained very cordial relations with the forefathers of Ghalib, was settled. Treatment was carried on for about six months and Ghalib progressed well in his health. Ghalib rode on horse and passing through Allahabad, Banaras, Murshidabad and other places reached Calcutta in February 1828. He filed his petition to the Court of the Governor General in April. A decision was struck on the petition that it should have been routed through the British Resident stationed in Delhi. It was practically impossible for Ghalib to return to Delhi. He engaged a lawyer, Lala Hira Lal to represent the case on his behalf.

Ghalib hurriedly secured letters of recommendations in the name of the Resident of Delhi and his Clerk of Court. These letters were despatched to the lawyer of Ghalib for moving the matter expeditiously and favourably. Those letters had a positive effect and the Resident of Delhi returned the petition with some favourable remarks to the Governor General. Unfortunately, Ghalib had to suffer the agonies of suspense and idleness as the petition with the comments of the Resident of Delhi took some ten months in its return to Calcutta Court.

Another unfortunate decision by the Resident of Delhi deepened the dejection of Ghalib. Sir Edward Colbrooke, Resident of Delhi was dismissed from service on a charge of embezzlement and corruption. Francis Hawkins who stepped into his shoes had a close friendship with Nawab Sham-sud Din Ahmed Khan. In his report submitted to the Governor General in Calcutta he recorded that the amount of seven hundred and fifty rupees as adjudged earlier by a decision was adequate for Ghalib. During his stay in Calcutta for about three years, Ghalib made friends with some British officials like Andrew Sterling and composed a brilliant panegyric in Sterling's honour. As nothing practical had come

out of his pension case, Ghalib engaged a lawyer, Munshi Nasrullah to proceed with his case on his behalf and himself returned to Delhi in November 1829.

#### THE POET'S PETITION

The poet's petition sought that the pension of three thousand rupees (or five thousand rupees) was not enough and further it had not been divided properly. It was prayed that Khwaja Haji or his successors should not get any share from this amount. Ghalib implored that after deducting three thousand rupees, he ought to be paid retrospectively the whole amount for the past years. The petition further prayed that the pensionary amounts be fixed again and all pension holders be awarded certificates to that effect. The last prayer was that all the pensions be paid from the British Treasury of Delhi instead of from the estate of Ferozpur Jhirka.

The main argument in Ghalib's petition was that the document by which the amount of pension had been reduced had forged signatures of Lord Lake. Sir John Malcolm, Secretary to Lord Lake, who decided this issue, rejected Ghalib's plea. Mirza Ghalib made repeated appeals for a favourable decision, but nothing positive emerged.

William Fraser, British Agent in Delhi, was shot dead in March 1835 while on his way to his residence. One Karim Khan was arrested on a charge of assassination. He was the incharge of the hunting party of Nawab Sham-sud-Din of Ferozpur Jhirka. Two other servants of the Nawab were also taken into custody. Simon Fraser, a Delhi Magistrate summoned the Nawab to Delhi because it was believed that he could be the accomplice behind the murder. William Fraser had supported the cause of Nawab Zia-ud-din and Amin-ud-Din Khan of Loharu. The British, therefore, presumed that it might have forced the Nawab to wreak vengeance. Karim Khan and Nawab Sham-sud-Din Khan

were prosecuted and hanged for the murder.

The reaction of the Muslim community of the Capital was evidently against Ghalib who was a close friend of the British Agent. Ghalib used to be on visiting terms with Simon Fraser, the Magistrate who was investigating the case. A suspicion continued to grow strong for long that it was Ghalib who had poisoned the ears of the Magistrate to award the death sentence to the Nawab.

#### LITERARY ENCOUNTERS

Ghalib was known for literary duels with his counterparts. The two literary encounters that arose at Allahabad and Calcutta at poetical symposiums are quotable. The poet was highly sensitive never tolerating any poet to question his supreme ability in poetry. There arose some furore against Ghalib at Calcutta over the usage of some expressions in poetry. It developed into a full-length controversy later on in which very top-notch critics and scholars of both the sides participated using venomous expressions against each other.

Ghalib used to play chess with his friends who assembled at his place every day. But once he had to pay a heavy price for it. His house was raided by the police and Ghalib was arrested along with his friends on a charge of gambling. He was awarded six months' rigorous imprisonment and a fine of two hundred rupees. And in case of non-payment of fine, another six months. This sentence lowered the prestige of Ghalib. So long as the Kotwal of Delhi was Mohammed Mirza Khan, Ghalib and his friends had no fear of being caught. Khan was a fast friend and admirer of Ghalib. It so happened that once Fazal Hassan Khan took charge as the new Kotwal of Delhi. He was a strict disciplinarian and it was he who arrested Ghalib on a charge of gambling and the case was referred to Kanwar Wazir Ali Khan, Magistrate, Delhi,

Voluntary helping hands came forward from all quarters. Even Bahadur Shah Zafar, the Moghul Emperor wrote a letter of recommendation to the Magistrate. A handful of letters also poured in from other keymen of the city. In short, a section of the people attempted to see that Ghalib should not get any stigma. But the Kotwal was too stiff to allow Ghalib to be acquitted with honour. In appeal, the decision of the lower Court was confirmed. But Ghalib was released on the recommendations of the Civil Surgeon after undergoing imprisonment for three months.

#### IMPRISONMENT

Ghalib was highly dejected at his imprisonment to observe: "I think everything comes from God and no one can find fault with His commandments. I would accept everything what comes in my way, but to yearn for a better and prosperous life is no sin. I think I should not now remain in life for long and if I were to live, I should quit India and pass the remainder of my life either in Egypt or Iran or Italy. If my place of emmigration is Ka'ba, it would be all the more pleasing. It is my last wish and God may give me some favourable opportunity of seeing my last wish fulfilling into a practical reality."

During Ghalib's imprisonment, his friends proved very helpful to him. Nawab Shaifta used to frequently visit him in jail and pocketed the entire expenditure during Ghalib's imprisonment. Besides, Shaifta rushed to a number of officials to get Ghalib's release. Shaifta was frank to acknowledge before his friends that he was courteous, cordial and helpful to Ghalib because of Ghalib's poetic qualities and not because of Ghalib's piety of character. It was no big crime in his eyes that Ghalib had been prosecuted on a charge of gambling and that he was a drunkard from the very beginning of his life.

Ghalib continued to face financial crisis almost throughout his life. Around 1833, this crisis touched its peak, when Ghalib was constrained to think at times of joining some Maharaja's or Nawab's entourage. He continued to suffer the pricks of poverty for a long number of years. It was in 1835 that the creditors of Ghalib filed various suits of recovery in various courts. And a decree of five thousand rupees was passed against him. Nasikh, a noted poet of Lucknow advised Ghalib to proceed to Deccan where art and poetry were highly patronized. This suggestion had little meaning for Ghalib who observed: "My poetry will not be appreciated there. Where Qateel is admired for Persian Muse and Shah Naseer is considered a great master in Urdu, how can Ghalib and Nasikh be assessed properly in such an environment?"

Kale Sahib recommended to the Moghul Emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar to give some financial aid to Ghalib. Zafar who was a very kind-hearted king, hit upon a graceful plan. He commissioned Ghalib to write a history of the Temur dynasty in Persian. Another honour came from Zafar when he confirmed the title of Najum-ud-Dawlah; Dabir-ul-mulk, Nizam Jung on Ghalib. He was also awarded a royal robe and was given an employment in the Royal Court with a specific assignment and fixed salary.

Zauq remained the Poet-Laureate of the Zafar's Court for a long number of years but after Ghalib's employment, Zafar started showing his verses for correction to Ghalib. After Zauq's death, Ghalib became practically the literary tutor of the Moghul king. The younger son of Bahadur Shah Zafar, Mirza Khizr Sultan also accepted the tutelage of Ghalib. It was during this year that Mohammed Wajid Ali Shah of Oudh started paying five hundred rupees to Ghalib as a pension. These two Court patronages could have gratified Ghalib to spend the remainder of his life in peace and plenty, but unfortunately in 1856, the estate of

Oudh was annexed to the British Empire and Wajid Ali Shah was detained at Calcutta. The Mutiny, a title given by the British or the First War of Independence (1857) as known by the Indians, also proved disadvantageous for Ghalib in certain respects. Mirza Khizr Sultan was caught at Humayun Tomb and was shot dead by the British. Bahadur Shah Zafar was tried on a charge of abetting the rebels and was sent to Rangoon in October 1858. Thus the Court patronage which Ghalib enjoyed for some time became also extinct.

#### MUTINY DAYS

Ghalib has recorded in detail whatever he witnessed during the Mutiny days in July 1857. Never he remained a passive spectator of the rise and fall of fortune, but always a man fully conscious and alive to the situation around him. Ghalib's Mutiny memoirs have been recorded in Persian entitled 'Dastanbau'. Ghalib in those days used to live in the Ballimaran area of Delhi, where the majority of residents hailed from Patiala. Maharaja of Punjab had got erected in earlier times a high wall for the protection of his people. In spite of that, Ghalib and the population around him suffered heavily during the Mutiny. Ghalib's wife shifted her ornaments and costly clothes to Kale Sahib assuming that those would be safe there, but unfortunately everything was lost there.

Ghalib has given a splendid description, in a letter of the destruction of the city of Delhi in those days. "It is not the Delhi where you were born, nor it is the city where you received education in the Haveli of Shaban Beg. Again it is not that Delhi which I had been visiting from time to time from the day I was seven years of age. It is not even that Delhi where I have been living for some fifty-one years."

Ghalib was given adequate assistance by his friends and admirers during those stormy days. It was Munshi Hargopal Tafta who sent Ghalib some money, while Lala Mahesh Das

# CANDLE'S SMOKE

(Ghalib's Life and Verse)

INDER JIT LALL



SALUJA PRAKASHAN

145, Tilak Bazar, DELHI-6.

(INDIA)

made provisions for wine. Munshi Hira Singh Dard, Pandit Sheoji Ram and his son, Balmokand helped him a lot and stood by his side during those critical days. Ghalib's younger brother, Yusuf Mirza died during the Mutiny, and his daughter and wife fled to Japan. Ghalib would have been heart broken at this bereavement but he bore the loss with fortitude.

#### LOVE FOR DESCENDANTS

Reverting to Ghalib's domestic life, it may be mentioned that Umrao Begum gave birth to some seven children, but most unfortunately, all died during their childhood. No one lived beyond 15 months of age. "It has really grieved me," Ghalib recorded once in a letter to a friend who suffered from an equal affliction, "to hear that your son passed away soon after his birth. Brother, I know the sore of such an affliction. God graced me with seven children—boys and girls—but no one survived beyond 15 months."

To avoid disappointment of his parental affection, Ghalib adopted Zain-ul-Abdin Khan poetically surnamed Arif, as his son. Arif was Ghalib's nephew also and was a lovable poet in his own right who accepted the tutelage of Shah Naseer in his early life. But as he grew mature, he adopted Ghalib to be his tutor. Unfortunately, Arif died at the age of 36 leaving behind him two sons to be looked after and brought up by Ghalib and his Begum. Ghalib was highly dejected and composed in Urdu an elegy over the death of Arif.

Your death promises me of a union on Doomsday,  
 What Doomsday would it be,  
 Than the tragic day of today,  
 When you have departed eternally.

Arif's son, Baqir Ali Khan was about five years of age when his father died. He was married to Mu'azzam Zamani Begum *alias* Bagga Begum, daughter of Nawab Zia-ud-din Ahmed Khan. Baqir Ali Khan would write poetry in Persian



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and Urdu. In Persian, he adopted Baqir, and in Urdu, Kamil as surnames. Mu'azzam Zamani Begum would feel hurt when Ghalib in joviality, would crack jokes with Umrao Begum. But Umrao Begum was always prompt to clinch the issue saying; "You are a child, my dear daughter. Do not mind the jokes of this dotard for he has gone mad." At another time, Umrao Begum so blurted out: "Good God, this old man has run amuck as he would always be in search of a person who could be a fit target to his sallies. And now he has chosen his own daughter-in-law to bear the brunt of his bon mots."

The second son of Arif was Hussain Ali Khan who was born in 1850. He too was a poet of Urdu and Persian like his brother. These two youngsters were most fortunate to have Ghalib and Umrao Begum as their guardians, especially Ghalib was always keen to provide for them pigeons, goats, kites and other toys to play with. Besides, in spite of his eccentricity, Ghalib ever took pains to keep these boys in good spirits: "The boys of Arif do not allow me a nap in the afternoon," Ghalib wrote to Tafta. "They would rush bare-footed any moment to my bed, sprinkle water, and spread dust, but I never feel perturbed." Of these boys, the junior one was somewhat a spendthrift and Ghalib, out of sheer love, nick-named him "Larke Badshah."

Mohammed Yusuf Ali Khan, the Nawab of Rampur, renewed his invitation to Ghalib, after the Mutiny, for a visit to his State. The Nawab had studied some elementary Persian from Ghalib during his childhood and held the poet in reverence. The poet composed a splendid (*qasida*) panegyric at the instance of Maulana Fazl Haq and submitted it to the Nawab who after exchange of a couple of letters fixed for Ghalib a monthly allowance of one hundred rupees which the poet continued to receive till the end of Nawab's life. The poet desired to reap the philanthropy of Maharaja

of Patiala also but somehow he gave up his idea of visiting the Maharaja.

#### NAWAB RAMPUR'S PHILANTHROPY

Ghalib's visit to Rampur earned some interest and honour for him. He took along with him the two sons of Arif. The Nawab gave a warm reception to Ghalib and arranged for his stay at the Royal Palace and later on in a spacious house. Ghalib's visit to Rampur and the Nawab's fixing up a monthly allowance for him gave the poet a sense of relief and security. Further it strengthened Ghalib's relations with the Nawab and went a long way in clearing the prejudice of the British against the poet.

In March 1859, the British decided to restore the pension of all beneficiaries withheld during the Mutiny but it did not come forth favourable for Ghalib. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan made endeavours to clear the suspicion of the British against Ghalib and the Nawab of Rampur also did his best. The result was somewhat positive in that in May 1860 Ghalib became the recipient of the full amount of pension due by him which enabled him to clear his debts. Another grace by the British was to reward in March 1863, the cloak of honour to Ghalib. The poet made a representation to the British Government to appoint him as a poet laureate of the Queen and for giving him higher status in the Royal Court (Durbar).

Yusuf Ali Khan, the Nawab of Rampur died of cancer in 1864. His son, Nawab Kalab-e-Ali Khan took charge of the throne and Ghalib proceeded with high hopes to see the new king. He took two sons of Arif along with him. But he returned home disappointed as the new king did not show him that high hospitality and warmth which the previous ruler used to accord him. In a letter, Ghalib so recorded to Hargopal Tafta: "Dear Sir, I took rice, amused myself,

tore my clothes and returned home.”

Ghalib was a princely type of man who did not accept much a dogmatic way of life. But his kindness of manners was highly remarkable in adjusting his conjugal life in such a fashion that Umrao Begum (a religious type of woman) never bemoaned if Ghalib was ever neglectful of her. It was from Rampur that he communicated to his friend : “See my wife immediately and enquire if Shahab-ud-Din Khan has paid her fifty rupees to meet her expenses for the month of October.” Ghalib always impressd on his pupils to see that his Begum received every comfort she needed. “She generally falls sick during this season, “Ghalib once wrote to Hakim Ghulam Najaf Khan. “She has with her a prescription of Ma’ulham, a tonic. See that she uses it and be in touch with her to inform me of her welfare.”

Ghalib fell ill and grew very weak towards the fag end of his life. Regarding his shattered health he so recorded in his letter to Moulvi Habib Ullah Khan : “Do you know the state of my health ? I was so weak earlier too but now I am half-dead. I was deaf before, but now I am blind too. Whenever I scribble four lines, my fingers become benumbed. I have seen some 71 to 72 seasons of my life but the remainder would not be a stretch of long number of years. It is now a period of minutes and days.”

In February 1867, Ghalib requested his pupils and admirers to get this report published in all papers : “My friends, if you do not receive a direct letter from me, please do not mind. If you receive a belated reply or a ghazal returned after a long number of days, please do not complain. Remember that I have never been neglectful of my friends and pupils. I have always been cordial and cooperative with them at all costs, but these days I am not in proper senses. I do not have either the stamina or the energy to do much for my friends. If

someone is yet displeased in spite of the publication of this report, he may excuse me. Had I been young, I would have beseeched my friends to help me. But, as I am sufficiently weak nowadays, I would ask them to pray for my salvation."

#### THE FLAME EXTINGUISHED

The flame of Ghalib's life flickered in early 1869 as he would remain in a state of coma almost everyday. A letter received from Nawab Alah-ud-Din Ahmed Khan of Loharu inquiring about his health was read out to him. When Ghalib regained consciousness for some moments, he dictated a reply: "Why do you ask me about myself? You will ask about me from my neighbours in a day or so." And pronouncing these words the poet relapsed into a coma again.

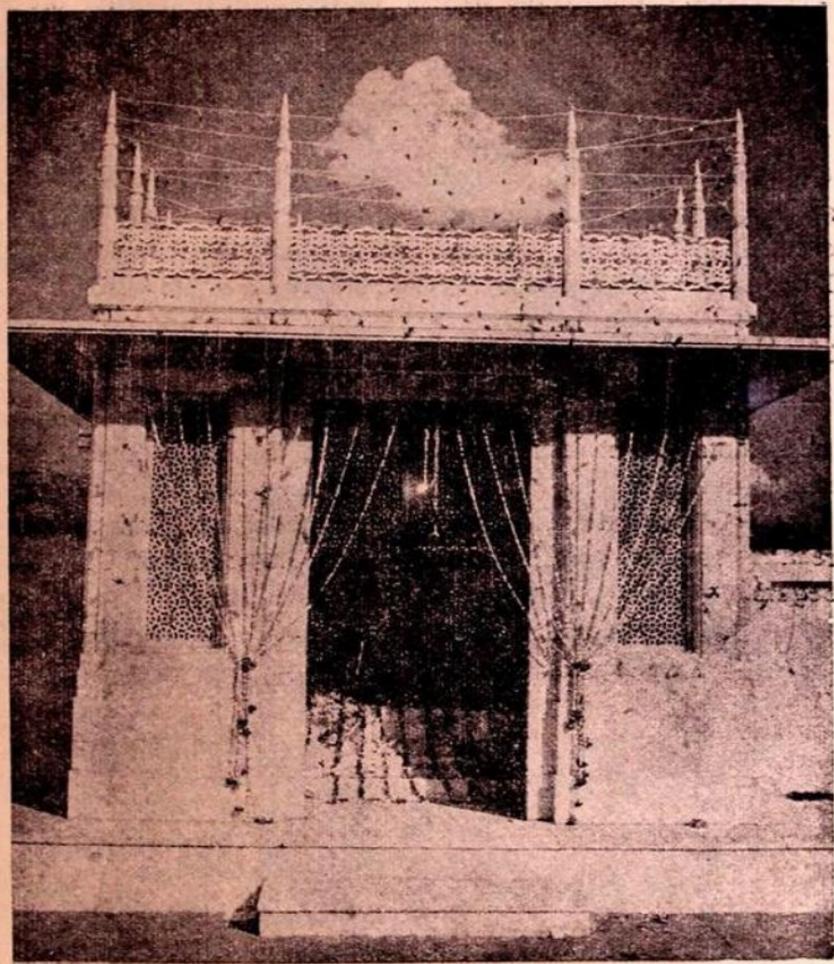
Ghalib's regaining of consciousness and relapsing into a state of coma continued for some days. The flame of life continued to flicker more and more every moment till it extinguished on February 15, 1869, in the afternoon. The light was no more, but the fortitude with which Ghalib fought the battle of life and the rare example he set to exist against odds, enabled him to carve his name in the annals of India. One of his famous Urdu couplets is very appropriate, very epigrammatic here to quote:

This corpse without a shroud,  
Is of broken-hearted Asad,  
O God, Thy grace on him,  
For he was a soul, fearless,  
And tradition could'nt bind him.

Ghalib yearned for many things in life and the level at which his hopes and aspirations found partly gratified did not satisfy him much. A picture of his desires is drawn here from a few select couplets from his *masnavi*. *Abre Guhr Bar*,



MAUSOLEUM OF GHALIB  
The Mausoleum of Ghalib is a fine example of the  
classical style of architecture. It is situated in the  
city of Delhi.



Ghalib's mausoleum

Ghalib was buried at Nizam-ud-Din (a colony of New Delhi) where a mausoleum duly erected stands today. The Nawab of Rampur sanctioned an allowance for Umrao Begum. The Begum requested the British Government to transfer the inherited pension of Mirza Ghalib in the name of Hussain Ali Khan. The request of Umrao Begum was rejected. There was a way to get this transfer regularised only for a sum of ten rupees if Umrao Begum could appear in person in the Court of Commissioner, Delhi. But the Begum refused to appear in Court observing: "I will never visit the Court even if I die of dire poverty. Will I earn a grace for my husband or uncle or father? The respect or estate which my uncle enjoyed and the esteem which my father and my husband shared is known by one and all."

Umrao Begum could not live for long. Life's loneliness, dotage, and long standing debts lay heavy over her mind. She died on February 4, 1870 and was laid to rest beside Ghalib's tomb. A look at the mausoleum today reminds us of two great souls — of Mirza Ghalib and of Umrao Begum.





The world has many a worthy poet,  
With name and fame in poesy,  
But Ghalib, they say,  
Weaves his verse in a singular style.

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## GHALIB AND THE GHAZAL

Mirza Ghalib practised almost all forms of poetry—the ghazal, the *Qasida*, and the *Masnavi*, but in the ghazal, he earned more name and fame than in other forms of poetry. At a stage, he labelled his Urdu poetry consisting mostly of ghazals to be unrepresentative and colourless and yet the ghazal proved to be his main forte, a true representative of his art.

The ghazal needs an explanation. It has an Arabic origin and in Arabic it implies 'talking to a woman or talking love'. And the ghazal was construed to be a song or a lyric consisting of random thoughts occurring to a lover. Such thoughts could be complaints of separation, longings for union, and sensations of pain and pleasure that characterize experiences of love.

The ghazal starts with a couplet called the *Matla*, the last word but one in the first line (or hemistich) known as *Qafia*, rhymes with the last word but one in the second line (or hemistich). The ghazal closes with a verse called the *Maqta*, in which the poet generally introduces his *non de plume* or surname.

All the couplets from the *Matla* to the *Maqta* are composed in the same metre and the endings of the second lines of each couplet, known as the *Radif* must rhyme together. The usual rhyme-scheme of the ghazal is aa, ba, ca, da and so on. The couplets of the ghazal vary in number and

in it the relation between the two endings of a couplet is basically of sound and not of sense. All the same, every two lines which form a couplet are interdependent in that they jointly convey a meaning or an idea. Generally, every couplet of the ghazal conveys a meaning quite independent of other couplets, but at times one idea or one thought can run into several couplets with a sequence as it runs in a poem.

To the readers of English verse, the ghazal might appear as an unusual form of poetry. In a way, it is like the heroic couplet of the eighteenth century practised admirably by Alexander Pope and his contemporaries.

Ghalib's ghazals are interwoven with innumerable threads - of Nature, religion, mysticism, humanism, Bacchus, love, and life. Ghalib was no practical mystic, but he sprinkled in his ghazals some mystical ideas about man and God. In religion, he was most secular, liberal, and most non-conservative which is well borne out from his views couched in his ghazals. His love couplets contain distinctive strains of rapture, woes, passions, wit and fancy. And Bacchus proved to be an effective integument for his poetic effusions. In short so universal is the character of his ghazal compositions that every nuance of human nature finds its poetic revelation through them.

Ghalib did not preach any particular philosophy of life in his ghazals. He was no reformer to eradicate the evils of society. With no fascination for any particular scheme of things, he loved life and humanity. He had a cosmopolitan outlook and believed to enjoy the richness of life.

Ghalib had a bit of Shelley reflected in his ghazals. He underwent protracted stresses and strains of his times ; would not attain adequate recognition for his literary talents for almost throughout his life ; was accused of being a gambler ; his powerful and jealous foes endeavoured to disgrace him.

many a time in as much as even the restoration of his pension proved a life-long enigma for him. But he had an exemplary courage and fortitude to fight the battle of life and displayed a high sense of tolerance, moral grandeur and optimism in his verse.

Ghalib possessed a tremendous power of condensation of ideas which the ghazal ordinarily demands from its practitioner, and he was able to compose in a masterly way his short aesthetic experiences, fragmentary spasms of inspiration and variegated romantic emotions in the most terse, effective, and scintillating idiom.

Ghalib was a poet of imagination, refined sensibility, and keen aesthetic perception and he created ghazals of rare power and charm, both in Persian and Urdu, delineating in them the intense pathos of life, the agony of human sufferings and the tragedies of human mind in the most subtle idiom. He chiselled the language and incorporated scores of new similies, metaphors, symbols and imageries in his ghazals.

Ghalib's ghazals carry a universal appeal and an immeasurable delight. Those have been widely read, quoted, admired and translated in many languages of the world. Several among them have become very effective proverbs. His ghazals elevate us, captivate us, and strike a responsive chord in our minds. In a way, they accompany us through all stages of human experiences because Ghalib knew well the variegated stages of human soul.

## NEW HUE

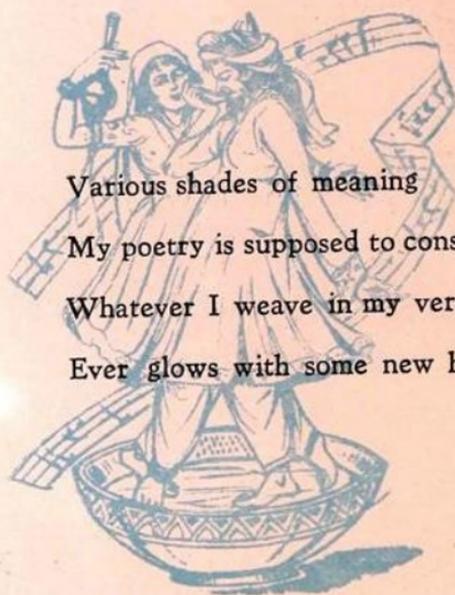
(*Ganjina-i-maani.....*)

Various shades of meaning

My poetry is supposed to construe ;

Whatever I weave in my verse

Ever glows with some new hue.



CHAZALS

## TILL DAWN

(*Ah ko..... honay tuk*)

The life-long sighs of he who loves  
Move at last the loved one's heart ;  
Who lives on to the day  
To clasp in luck, beauty's black tresses ?

A wave engulfs  
The stretch of a hundred crocodiles ;  
What fate the rain-drop meets  
To turn a pearl within an oyster shell ?

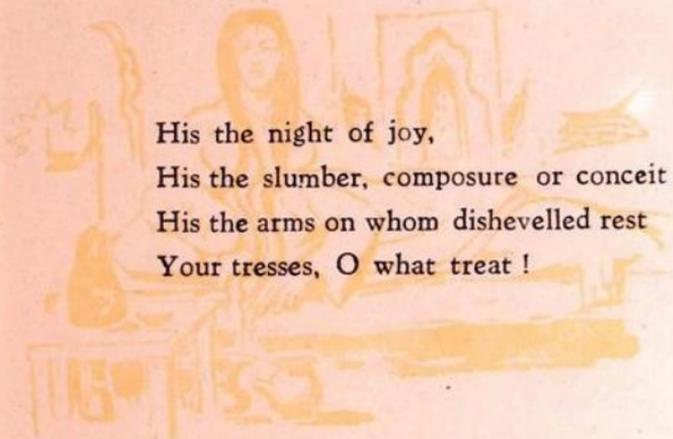
I grant, my kind love  
Will not erase me from her heart ;  
Too soon I shall return to dust  
Before she ever cares or knows.

The dew learns to be not  
When the great sun peeps from the eastern window;  
I too crave to follow suit  
If my love but casts a kindly glance.

With no escape, it is death alone  
Terminates sorrow in human life ;  
The candle flickers a whole night  
And lingers on till the dawn.

## NIGHT OF JOY

*(Neend uski hai.....)*



His the night of joy,  
His the slumber, composure or conceit ;  
His the arms on whom dishevelled rest  
Your tresses, O what treat !

## ROSE AND DUST

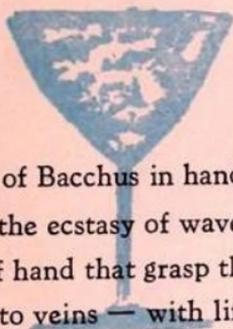
*(Sab kahan..... ho gaeen)*

Of the multitude sliding into the dust below  
Only a few could sprout as poppy and rose ;  
But the loveliness of those faces  
That were laid in eternal rest, who knows !

Beauteous and colourful the revelries  
Fresh, for long they glowed of their kind ;  
But to mere memory-images they're reduced now  
In the dark recesses of my mind.

In the oneness of God, we believe  
We renounce custom, ritual and creed ;  
For when they all are effaced  
A true faith springs forth indeed.

When men to melancholy are grown used  
All afflictions seem to be on the wane,  
So numerous have been my trials with them  
That they have ceased to give me any pain.



A bowl of Bacchus in hand  
Infuses the ecstasy of waves,  
Lines of hand that grasp the bowl  
Turn into veins — with life overflowing.

Note, ye comers to this world  
If I did so bewail ;  
A noxious waste and wild  
Over all habitations would prevail.

## FOREWORD

Ghalib is, perhaps, the most fascinating of all the Urdu poets for the readers of languages other than Urdu. There have appeared from time to time articles and books on Ghalib's life and art in different major world languages, especially in English. Only last year, Ghalib centenary was celebrated throughout the world. One of the important aims of the centenary celebrations was to introduce Ghalib where he is not properly known, through translations and critical elucidations.

Such attempts have helped in projecting Ghalib as an international cultural link and have also been of use in pointing to certain elements in Ghalib's poetry which go into the making of the highest literary standards. For those who are not familiar with the tradition of Urdu Ghazal and its cultural background, a detailed account of the life of a poet like Ghalib, may be as interesting and even puzzling, to a measure, as the traditional Urdu Ghazal itself.

In this book, Mr Inderjit Lall has given a short, and interesting account of Ghalib's life. Some general characteristics of the Ghazal and Ghalib's distinction in this form, have also been dealt with quite competently in a brief chapter.

## BRICK AND HEART

*(Dil he.....aaye kyun)*

My, heart is soft  
Being neither brick nor stone ;  
Not strange that it brims with pain.  
If it sheds a thousand tears  
Let no one oppress my heart  
But leave me alone to my lot.

Without a house of God  
With neither hearth nor home,  
By the wayside I stand;  
Why should anyone ask me  
To make way even from there ?

Resplendent like the high-noon sun  
Need our bewitching beauty  
Remain obscure.  
If she put on her veil  
That would shadow her grace.

Life's bondage and fetters of grief  
One and the same are they, dear man ;  
There's no escape from sorrow's span  
Tis death that cuts it and no one else can.

Without a spirit or spark of life  
Will the world yet be poor anyway, my heart !  
Why weep and raise loud laments  
Day in and day out ?

## COURSE OF STARS

*(Bia keh.....aasman bigardanim)*

Come beloved, let's change the course of stars  
Plunge our fates into our foaming cups  
And fix our eyes on earth's charms.

Let's perch in a narrow niche  
Not caring of the troubles that come,  
Without a fear of he who brings to book,  
And unafraid of the awe of the king.

Strew fragrant flowers, we'll  
Mix rose-water and wine  
And sprinkle it in our path,  
We'll then drink bubbling bowls to our fill.

Of crowds tired  
We'll yearn for silver solitude ;  
We'll banish friends  
The music-maker and the tavern-keeper  
From the assembly  
And rejoice in the warmth of togetherness.

We'll sport with each other's tresses  
Embrace and kiss with an ardour  
Such that the stars will quake and blush.

We'll hold back the breath of dawn  
Wipe out the heat of the weather  
And woo with each other with zeal and madness.

We'll return home  
The next morn  
After a glorious tete-a-tete.  
Oh, will wishes such as this come true one day !

Come beloved, let's change the course of stars.

## LYRICS OF LIFE

Merging into the river  
The water-drop is filled with  
An ecstasy—instant and unbounded.  
Life's constant sufferings  
When transgress the bounds of endurance  
Turn into a balm that soothes and cures.

To ashes, love-pangs  
Consume the heart,  
O, it yet goes out to love,  
Renounces the charm of composure,  
And enjoys living with pains and agonies.  
Were't not love-lorn  
Cares of life would it torn !

Every particle, a part of the whole  
Every drop, a symbol of the ocean—  
Is the law of life ;  
But t'd be a mere child's sport,  
If one lacks the seer's vision  
To look deep beyond terrestrial sights and sounds.

An eye narrow, a mind jealous,  
The best of life can never reap ;  
But a knowledge true, an outlook broad,  
Gains all what one does'nt keep.

## GRAVE

*(Sataish ger.....bagh-i-ruzwan ka)*

A heart drunk on ecstasy  
 Has no fancy for the garden of paradise  
 The Puritan so lauds ;  
 To me, it's not more than a faded bouquet  
 Lying in an obscure hole of oblivion.

A glimpse of you meant  
 A moon to the mirror-house;  
 As the sun strikes brightness  
 On a globule of dew.

In my shape and form  
 There's latent that break-up too ;  
 The dazzling lightning of the harvest  
 Is but the hot-blood of the man bent on the plough.

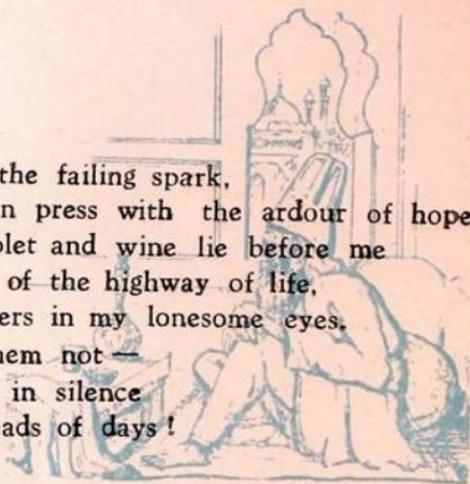
Mute, with a million strangled desires  
 Buried in my core,  
 An unknown pauper am I—  
 Unsung lying within a sunless grave.

My man, images of death heaped all around  
 Are but man's asset ;  
 They counsel that soon or late  
 The worlds dissolve, the men die.

## MY EYES

(Go haath ko.....)

My hand is the failing spark,  
I cannot even press with the ardour of hope.  
Let the goblet and wine lie before me  
By the side of the highway of life,  
Till life lingers in my lonesome eyes.  
O, remove them not —  
While I tell in silence  
These sad beads of days!



## BACCHANALIA

My saki ! you despise and refuse  
To pass the bubbling wine-glass to me ;  
Oh, grant at least the wine  
Pour it out into the cupped palms of mine.

The holy bubbles vex you  
O you turned-puritan now.  
You will taste of it not, nor let others of it think ;  
Ah, thirst for a resplendence !

Howsoever gravely we may harp  
On matters mystic, things divine ;  
Our speech will not make sense  
Without the idiom of cup and wine.

When I've abandoned the tavern  
No binding of a fixed place ;  
To the lees I may now drink wine  
In a mosque, or school, or shrine.

This mystic vein  
The sublime style of your lines ;  
You harbour the virtues of a Cherub  
If your great thirst you could curb !

## A THING OF THE PAST

*(Zulmat kadey ..... josh hai)*

Within my home pervades  
 The darkness of the night  
 And the deep gloom of my mind ;  
 A lone candle though without flame or light  
 Symbolises the heralding of the dawn.

O, you novices to desire and love—  
 Who aim to revel in drink and dance,  
 At me look, if you have vision enough  
 And hear me if you have ears to heed.

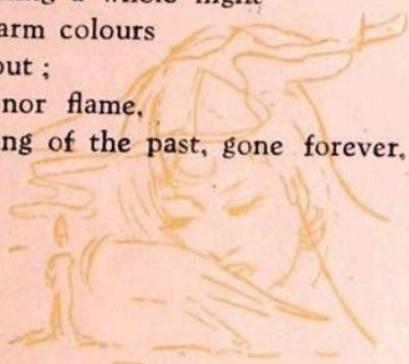
My saki ! allergic to faith and reason  
 You glamour in fine spirits ;  
 And the singer at lyre in trance  
 Steals away our composure.

Last night we hankered after  
 Blooms and blossoms to be falling all around us ;  
 And fragrance and song  
 Filling the air with abundance.

The dangling gait of the bar-maid  
The sonorous twang of the harp—  
Were a feast for the eye,  
A very heaven for the ear.

But the very next dawn  
The night revellers, dancers, and buoyant friends,  
The heat of the intense moments,  
The exuberant abandon and ardour—  
Gone are all,  
And the assembly is scattered to winds.

The candle burning a whole night  
With strong, warm colours  
Is now gutted out ;  
No more fume nor flame,  
And love, a thing of the past, gone forever,



## THE BURN

*(Fughan keh..... sokht)*

O sorrow ! the burning tip of your flame  
 Envelops me  
 Consumes to ashes the marrow of my bones  
 And licks clean the mysteries of my mind.

The fire failed to set Abraham aflame, they say ;  
 Look, your lover catches fire  
 Without a spark,  
 Without a flame.

As the blossoms bloom in spring  
 A misgiving lurks in my mind—  
 Would'nt my nest perched on  
 The flower-bough be consumed ?

I don't bemoan the flower-vendor  
 For he is worldly wise ;  
 If I burn, I burn only for  
 He is in touch with he who tends the rose.

I am all aflame,  
 Is beauty unresponsive to my pain ?  
 Or are my rivals perplexed to alarm  
 With love-mysteries raging in their hearts ?

## BLOSSOMING SCARS

*(Dil mera ..... jal gya)*

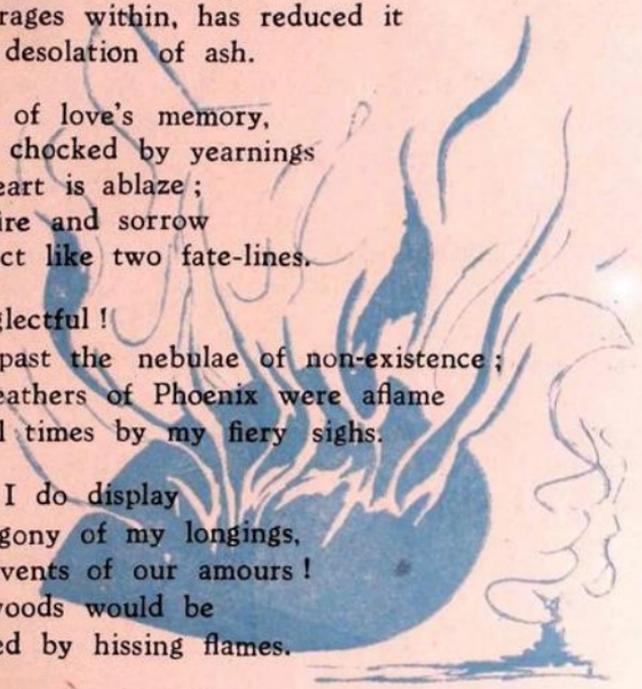
My stricken heart !  
 The all-consuming fire—  
 Silent but smouldering—  
 That rages within, has reduced it  
 To a desolation of ash.

Bereft of love's memory,  
 Mute, chocked by yearnings  
 My heart is ablaze ;  
 And fire and sorrow  
 Intersect like two fate-lines.

O, neglectful !  
 I am past the nebulae of non-existence ;  
 The feathers of Phoenix were aflame  
 Several times by my fiery sighs.

Were I do display  
 The agony of my longings,  
 Past events of our amours !  
 The woods would be  
 Ravaged by hissing flames.

Where is the heart ?  
 Where the blossoming scars ?  
 They all wilted away  
 With my indrawn sighs.



Translations of Ghalib's selected Urdu and Persian verse have been given in the last pages of the book. These translations are mostly literal and Mr Lall has tried to remain as close to the original as he could. Translation from one language into another is a creative art, and the translating-artist must needs have heaven-sent moments for the undertaking. It is at times almost impossible to translate certain phrases and words of the classical Urdu Ghazal especially those of Ghalib's because of their symbolic bearings, and ethnic-cultural connotations and nuances of meanings. Mr Lall has however, used his method of translation with a fair measure of success.

In the biographical part of the book, Mr Lall has presented only those incidents of Ghalib's life which may be regarded as of importance in shaping the mind of the poet. Ghalib's family, his cultural and philosophical sources, the ups and downs of the his personal life, and the upheavals and crises of his times have been ably brought out. It is not meant to be an all inclusive type of biography, and had it been so, it would have been a dull book for the readers. But this fairly authentic short biography of Ghalib is interesting and effective for its very brevity and precision.

It is hoped that this book will serve as a useful guide to Ghalib and his works for the English-reading public.

*Aligarh.*

(DR) KHURSHID-UL-ISLAM  
Head, Department of Urdu,  
*Aligarh University.*

## DUST

(*Mazey jahaan ..... khaak naheen*)

Life's Charm—

Not more than the dust of the desert ;  
The heart, but a lump of blood  
An epitaph of sorrows untold.

Wind that once propelled the wings  
Now blows them astray ;  
Neither more power, nor energy more,  
In feather, in down.

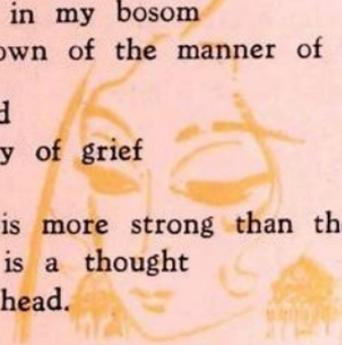
Who is she, entering my parlour  
With an angelic mien ?  
No stranger is in sight,  
In the brief cardboard parliament of green.

If my beauty is of an unsoften heart  
My own heart, in self-pity should move ;  
O, my tongue's a fool  
And brain's a dupe to words !

The image of scent and perfume  
Sends wine-dibblers into merriment ;  
O, what charm is there  
Behind the walls of the tavern ?

I feel astounded at the  
Crushing powers of love ;  
O, a desire lurks in my bosom  
I should have known of the manner of form !

My verse, O Asad  
Is but the progeny of grief  
In a world ;  
Where the word is more strong than the thing,  
Where the thing is a thought  
In a dead man's head.



## TRESSES

(*Muddat hui ..... kiye huay*)

It's been a long while love  
I held for you a feast  
With the merriments of smiling wine-cups  
And the joy of union.

I am gathering the scattered fragments of my heart  
That love shattered another day,  
Ages that I feasted my soul  
On the banquets of the black eyelashes of my proud beauty.

Those old rivals—the heart and the eye  
Have become close friends now ;  
There's an arrangement of banquet,  
Of sight and gaze, of reveries and feelings.

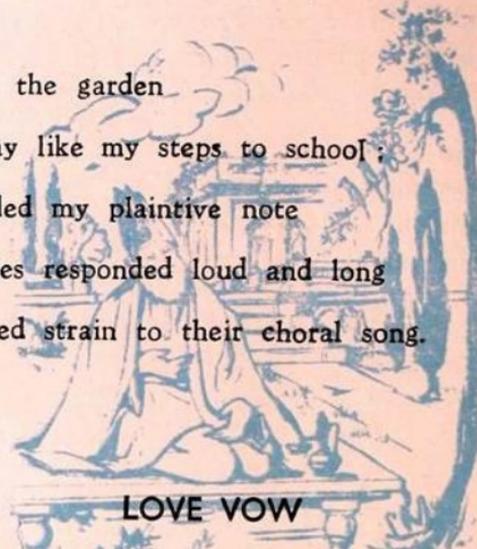
Again the longings for a sight—  
Love rising on the edge of a roof  
Like a full moon and  
Clouds of black tresses falling around.

Can stand no longer the suffocation in my heart,  
Uninstructed am I in the cannons of restraint ;  
For the old frenzied days of love, I crave,  
I beat my apparel threadbare.

I yearn again to enjoy a look  
At beauty's visage—  
Glowing with the red of rose  
And with the lustre of wine.

Ever and ever I long for the old days and nights  
Of touch and taste,  
Startling images of love  
Flash into my slumbering mind.

## SUGARED STRAIN

*(Main chaman ..... ho gaeen)*


My steps into the garden  
 Were in a way like my steps to school ;  
 When I sounded my plaintive note  
 The nightingales responded loud and long  
 And set sugared strain to their choral song.

## LOVE VOW

*(Aa ke ..... naheen hai)*

Let the charm of life be drawn from  
 The inner chambers of heart ;  
 O, the flowers wither away  
 When the spring sets out.  
 Dear heart ! you've pledged to  
 Bind me in your love-knots,  
 Unlucky I'd be if you break this pledge.  
 My soul has sworn not to touch the fiery spirits.  
 But on my soul you cannot pin a hope.

## DAYS OF YOUTH

*(Wo hijr ..... kahaan)*

Days of youth—  
 Days, nights, months, years  
 I joyed in long, long loving unions ;  
 Deep the longings, sad the partings.

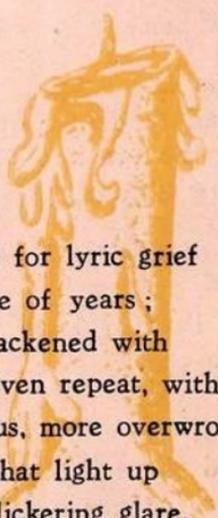
Gone, gone are the days of live desirings,  
 When unmindful of all  
 I loved my beauty's shimmerings.

Oh, whither blown the hours  
 Of your imaginings and tender reveries,  
 There, I'd draw from the crucible of my fermenting  
 Visions of breath-taking delight.

The perfect contours of my love's shape  
 Stir me no longer ;  
 My heart has become hard as bone  
 And mind bowed with age,  
 Shorn of the flames  
 Of the life's fire am I,  
 Too weak to withstand the full gaze of love.  
 Not even a hazy image of her can I now outline !

O, for youth !  
 Its loves and lusts, its zests, its zeals,  
 The abandons and the revels.  
 But tears of blood have dried  
 And the shrunken heart can leap no more.

## NOR FLAME, NOR FUME

*(Hasil se haath.....)*

My Heart !  
You're marked for lyric grief  
After the noise of years ;  
You're soot-blackened with  
Desires, that even repeat, with stresses taut,  
More tremulous, more overwrought,  
Like candles that light up  
Strange fires flickering glare.

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## P R E F A C E

The book carries the particulars of Ghalib's life, his ancestry, his boyhood, his married life, and his movements during the course of his life to various places of India. The events of Ghalib's life have been arranged almost chronologically and it has been attempted to fill in such extracts from Ghalib's letters or verse which have some bearing on his life.

A bunch of Ghazal masterpieces are appended at the end. It is the poetry of Ghalib which is enshrined in the hearts of millions of people of the world. I have titled these Ghazals as 'Candle's Smoke' because the candle is a very significant symbol in Persian & Urdu poetry. It is an effective metaphor and a very popular symbol for expression of myriad moods of love and life.

A candle burns, splutters, flickers, blows out, dies, sighs, and so on. A midnight candle stands for consummation of love while a candle flickering at dawn represents unhappiness and separation of lovers. Thus the variegated moods of love and life hover around this powerful poetic symbol.

The Ghazals — masterpieces and representatives— chosen from Urdu and Persian and rendered here are generally in full length, and they do not necessarily revolve round the motif of candle alone, but on other significant topics too which Ghalib practiced in his poetry.

I am grateful to Mr K. K. Kaul, Mr Keshev Malik and Mr Zahin Naqvi for their valuable suggestions.

INDER JIT LALL

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## SMOKE

The curl of smoke ascends  
Even as out the burning candle goes ;  
The rose flame of love, when I am no more  
Mourns somber, and somberer in the darkest robes.

Brief is life's joy  
Brief like a passing glance,  
The revels of the jocund company last  
As long as the gay spark's dance.

Ghalib ! love's flame blazes  
Higher, ever higher ;  
No disciplining it,  
No lightning it,  
As you would have it.

The ravages of love  
Bring charm to an empty existence,  
An assembly without a light  
Is quite like a harvest without lightning.

Let the current of light flow from my eyes  
On this night of parting—  
Fired by grief ;  
To my eye-balls will come  
Two suns overruling the gloom.